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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 002169

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR
GOLDBERGER/SHAMPAINE/BELGRADE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/WATERS;
TREASURY FOR SZUBIN/GRANT/HARRIS/NUGENT/HIRSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/18/2012

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SUBJECT: PA TO RESTRUCTURE ZAKAT COMMITTEES IN EFFORT TO
CURB FLOW OF FUNDS TO HAMAS

REF: JERUSALEM 1820

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) PA Minister of Endowments (Awqaf) and Religious Affairs Jamal Bawattna, who also serves as chairman of The Higher Committee for Zakat Affairs, announced October 17 that all Zakat committees in the West Bank will be restructured. Prime Minister Salam Fayyad confirmed this decision to the Consul General October 18. Bawattna stated that the committees will be restructured "on a professional basis" and "away from party or group affiliations" for the purpose of improving services to the underprivileged and the poor. (Note: Zakat is alms giving required of every adult Muslim having wealth in excess of that sufficient to meet basic needs. End note.) Fayyad has privately complained that the Zakat committees are being used to funnel money to Hamas.

¶2. (SBU) In comments to local press, Saleh al-Ruqub, who served as deputy minister of Awqaf under the Hamas-led government, characterized the move as an attempt to replace Zakat committee members affiliated with Hamas with individuals allied with Fatah. He asserted that Zakat committee members are unpaid volunteers neither recruited nor employed by the PA and the ministry has no authority to remove them.

¶3. (SBU) The Ministry of Awqaf announcement follows an August 27 PA cabinet decision to dissolve over 100 charitable and non-government organizations due to violations of laws governing civil groups (reftel).
WALLES